Rhode Island on Lovecraft

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Grant-Hadley

HOWARD PHILLIPS LOVECRAFT

SONIA GREENE (LOVECRAFT)

(*Frontispiece*)

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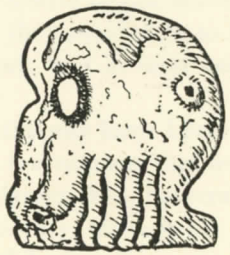


FOREWORD

SINCE 1941, the public has steadily leaned towards a new field of fiction. Though fantasy is not new, its recent popularity has produced many collections of the macabre and supernatural. Modern writers are gradually supplanting the creators of the Gothic Romance, Walpole, Radcliffe, and Lewis; and foremost among the twentieth century writers of the United States is Howard Phillips Lovecraft of Providence, Rhode Island.

The latter's following is immense,—huge numbers of fans have purchased the several volumes published by ARKHAM HOUSE, a company dedicated to publishing the entire works of this scholar. Other companies, BARTHOLOMEW HOUSE and WORLD, have published inexpensive editions which have sold in large numbers. Lovecraft is also found in almost every volume of collected fantasy, notably *Great Tales of Terror and the Supernatural, Sleep No More,* and *Creeps By Night.*

Though extremely well known in fantasy circles, Howard Phillips Lovecraft has received but little local recognition. The sole representation known to fandom is the well known article, "His Own Most Fantastic Creation," of Winfield Townley Scott, literary editor of the *Providence Journal.* Mr. Scott began a campaign for local recognition of H. P. Lovecraft late in 1943, and as a result of his articles, Lovecraft gathered several followers in and around Rhode Island.

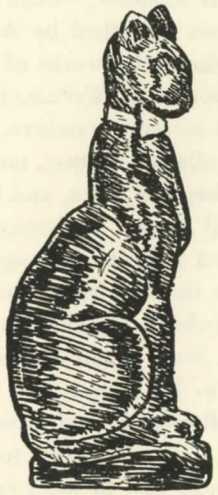
Without an exception, the contributors to this publication have been old adherents of Lovecraft, and in most cases have actually been acquaintances.

Mrs. Clifford Eddy of this city knew Lovecraft both as a writer and a friend, and it is through her courtesy that we are printing the new pictures of H.P.L. and the former Mrs. Lovecraft. Miss Marian Barner of the Providence Public Library, through her interest in cats, became a correspondent of Howard Lovecraft.

The reprint rights of "Lovecraft and Benefit Street," first published in *The Ghost* by W. Paul Cook, have been kindly granted by the author and Mr. Cook. Mr. and Mrs. H. Douglass Dana, prominent booksellers of this city, knew Mr. Lovecraft as a collector, and upon the death of H.P.L., secured a greater portion of his collection, several of which are illustrated for you by Miss Betty Wells Halladay.

The Editors.

Providence, June 1945



LOVECRAFT AS POET

By Winfield Townley Scott

SO FAR as I am aware, no commentator on Lovecraft's work has made more than a passing notice of his verse. The United Amateur Press Association, which channelled so much of his writing, was not strong on literary criticism; and his other, larger, field of publication —in the horror story—quite properly regarded poetry as secondary matter as far as it was concerned. In Lovecraft's complete work, certainly, his verse remains incidental: it has less distinction than his best stories, and it is presumably less interesting than his letters. Yet the evidence is that, particularly in his youth, Lovecraft's most concentrated attention was upon the writing of poetry; that at one time or another he probably thought of himself as primarily a poet, (and it was as "poet" that his mother referred to him in her recorded conversations with the psychiatrist at Butler Hospital when she became a patient there in 1919). There are then, it seems to me, two good reasons for making at least a brief survey of Lovecraft's verse. One is that all the work of any writer as considerable as Lovecraft merits consideration. The other is that a few of Lovecraft's poems are in themselves rather good.

What we have to go on are the approximately fifty well-filled pages of "Selected Poems" as published in the second omnibus Lovecraft volume, *Beyond the Wall of Sleep,* (Arkham House, 1943). They appear to be a very adequate demonstration of Lovecraft as poet, good, bad, and indifferent.

The bulk of the poems fall into one or the other of two manners of verse brought to perfection in Lovecraft's beloved eighteenth century England. One is the neat, or if with Keats you prefer "the rocking-

horse," couplet. This Pope or Dryden style is imitated by Lovecraft in "Old Christmas" and "New England Fallen," and possibly carried on to Sir Walter Scott's narrative manner in "Psychopompos." The other is the more dulcet, rural or elegiac tone, usually in quatrains, as mastered by Thomas Gray and James Thomson. "Providence," "On a Grecian Colonnade in a Park," "Sunset," and "On a New England Village Seen by Moonlight" are Lovecraft poems in this manner. The first stanza of "Sunset" illustrates the literary influence flawlessly:

> The cloudless day is richer at its close;
> A golden glory settles on the lea;
> Soft, stealing shadows hint of cool repose
> To mellowing landscape, and to calming sea.

All these poems, indeed most of Lovecraft's, are "early poems"; that is they were written before his thirtieth birthday—perhaps most of them between 1912 and 1920. They are quite dull, even unreadable at times. Their inspiration seems utterly literary. They never escape from or overcome the derivative quality, and they are clogged with eighteenth century mannerisms which refuse transposition into the twentieth century. They are completely out of touch with Lovecraft's actual time as no vital poetry can ever be. They are further damaged by the strong racial and social snobbery of Lovecraft's earlier years; what they frequently say is as restricted and eccentric as the manner in which it is said. In short, the quaintness and old-worldness which in his horror stories became an attractive other worldliness remain wholly inefficient in his poetry.

This same criticism can be made of another group of his poems for which the dominant influence is Poe. Some of these are "Astrophobos," "Despair," and "Nemesis"; and probably others, in mood and feeling if not so slavishly in meter. One sample, from "Nemesis," will do:

> Through the ghoul-guarded gateways of slumber,
> Past the wan-mooned abysses of night,
> I have lived o'er my lives without number,
> I have sounded all things with my sight;
> And I struggle and shriek ere the daybreak, being
> driven to madness with fright.

Lovecraft never got beyond schoolboy imitation in this sort of thing.

One wonders what, if anything, Lovecraft made of the American poetry of his own era; and particularly because from 1912 on—precisely when he was coming to maturity and writing much of his own verse—our poetry itself had come to a great new resurgence of vitality

and individuality. Perhaps his published letters will show. The few letters I happen to have seen revealed an admiration for the poetry of Robert Hillyer, an able traditionalist, but quick disdain and misunderstanding of such an experimentalist as T. S. Eliot. He knew slightly that extraordinary poet Hart Crane, but whether he was familiar with Crane's poetry I do not know. Yet of course one can pretty safely guess on the evidence of Lovecraft's general character and on that of his verse that his sympathies remained profoundly apathetic, wrapped in his eighteenth century escape, to the "new" poetry of his time. Indeed, not only did Walt Whitman live and die in vain as far as Lovecraft was concerned; so even did John Keats and all the Romantics. He had, to put it simply, a fatal misconception of poetry as a living art.

Oddly enough, Lovecraft got away from this. Perhaps not oddly; for after all in his last decade and despite his eccentric life Lovecraft exhibited a much firmer sense of reality, a warmer sense of humor and of friendship. Emotionally he was more adult. A poem called "A Year Off," dated 1925, shows the first flicker of freshness in his verse. It is light, humorous, deftly done, an extravaganza of far travel which concludes with the Huysmans' touch that after all the thorough-going and imaginative anticipation is probably better than the actuality. But in its course it has verbal fun with its ideas: "To dally with the Dalai Lama" is a particularly fortunate moment.

Then, far more impressively, came the prolific spate of poetry between December 1929 and early January 1930. In three or four weeks Lovecraft wrote "Brick Row" and "The Messenger" and—these within apparently a week—the 36 sonnets, "Fungi from Yuggoth." In general their style is simple and direct, the earlier poetic derivations sloughed off. The horror of his best stories is at last used with effective understatement in verse. "They took me slumming" is, for instance, a phrase from one of the "Fungi" sonnets that would have dynamited the artificialities of his earlier poems; and almost everywhere the language is equally alive, and the horror effects all the sharper for being quietly spoken.

Perhaps as wholly satisfactory as any poem he ever wrote is the separate sonnet, "The Messenger," which Lovecraft did as answer to Bertrand K. Hart's joyous threat to "send a monstrous visitor" to H.P.L.'s doorstep at 3 A.M.

The Thing, he said, would come that night at three
From the old churchyard on the hill below;
But crouching by an oak fire's wholesome glow,
I tried to tell myself it could not be.
Surely, I mused, it was a pleasantry
Devised by one who did not truly know
The Elder Sign, bequeathed from long ago,
That sets the fumbling forms of darkness free.
He had not meant it—no—but still I lit
Another lamp as starry Leo climbed
Out of the Seekonk, and a steeple chimed
Three—and the firelight faded, bit by bit.
Then at the door that cautious rattling came—
And the mad truth devoured me like a flame!

The chilling warning of that firelight fading bit by bit and then the "cautious" rattling—these two lines are worth more than all the pages of eighteenth century rubbish he wrote as poetry. And several of the sonnets in the "Fungi" sequence are about as keenly controlled.

Had there been, in place of the eighteenth century and Poe, another and newer influence? I am inclined to think, though on nothing but internal evidence, that Lovecraft had been reading the great contemporary poet of his time in America, Edwin Arlington Robinson. In his "A Year Off" the phrase "shame the sages" may be an echo of Robinson's line "Bereft enough to shame a sage" in "The Poor Relation"; or it may not. But the phrasing, the tone, the general approach—so to speak—of the "Fungi" sonnets are often Robinsonian.

To go at the problem in reverse of influence and chronology, let us look first at these Lovecraft lines:

No one had seen me take the thing—but still
A blank laugh echoed in my whirling head, . . .

But evil with some portent beyond speech, . . .

Farmer Seth Atwood was past eighty when
He tried to sink that deep well by his door, . . .
We laughed, and hoped he'd soon be sane again.

Out of what crypt they crawl, I cannot tell, . . .

John Whately lived about a mile from town, . . .

I cannot tell why some things hold for me
A sense of unplumbed marvels to befall, . . .

And there are more, but those will do.

Compare with those the techniques of such famous Robinson sonnets as "Reuben Bright," as "Haunted House" with its

There were no trackless footsteps on the floor
Above us, and there were no sounds elsewhere; . . .

as "The Dead Village" with its

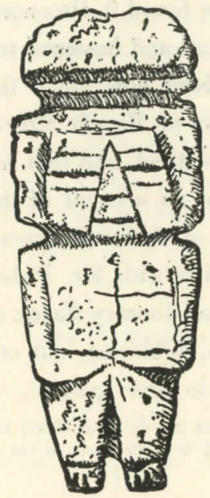
And over the forgotten place there clings
The strange and unrememberable light
That is in dreams; . . .

as—among others—"Alma Mater" with its

Out of what scum and up from what abyss,
Had they arrived—these rags of memory?

The interested reader must soak up both the "Fungi" sonnets and those of Robinson to feel (If I am correct) the full force of the case; I can do no more here than indicate the evidence, of which one part may be Robinson's suddenly increased fame in the late 1920's and the gathering into a separate book of his *Sonnets, 1889-1927* late in 1928, just a year before Lovecraft's "Fungi from Yuggoth." It is a general tone, a general approach, a way of phrasing that strike me as strongly resembling Robinson, and perhaps the fact that Lovecraft had hitherto written verse under other influences indicates that yet another took over in his last and best verse.

His best verse remains special for its purposes were restricted. Unlike Robinson's, it touched no depths of human significance. Unlike *The Ancient Mariner,* its terror has no meaning beyond itself, beyond mere nightmare. To scare is a slim purpose in poetry. But when Lovecraft at last brought his horror themes into unaffected verse he sometimes wrote effectively and so made that verse an interesting if minor portion of his work.



LOVECRAFT AND BENEFIT STREET*

By Dorothy C. Walter

BENEFIT STREET is one of the quaintly named older thoroughfares in Providence, Rhode Island, lying half way up College Hill between the campus of Brown University and the lower-lying and parallel stretch of South and North Main Streets which used to form the business center in early days of the city.

In the fall and winter of 1942-3 this quiet street came in for a great deal of newspaper mention when David Cornel DeJong, a young Hollander with several previous novels in English to his credit, used it as a setting for a new novel, and its name for the title of his book.

Reviews both commendatory and otherwise brought *Benefit Street* to attention. Local sales mounted high and continued to be brisk for a long time, for the Rhode Island reading public enjoyed finding a novel set in scenes intimately known and ably described. However, the staid citizens of Providence found it disconcerting that many characters in the book were indecorous, and hastened to write letters in protest to the *Providence Journal* about how much they disliked the neighbors Mr. DeJong had given them on Benefit Street, and how unfair they felt it to be to defame a whole street, and that an interesting and beautiful one, by giving its name to an account of the unpleasant goings-on of one boarding house full of fictional queer people. Others wrote in reminiscent vein, contrasting with Mr. DeJong's characters those who had given the historical and literary flavor to the street—Washington, Abigail Adams, Poe, Mrs. Whitman and others who had graced the street with their presence in times past.

* First published in **The Ghost** by W. Paul Cook, and issued by him as a brochure, limited edition of each. Reprinted by permission of the author and of Mr. Cook.

Just when the discussion of what kind of people one could expect to find there was quieting down, the Federal Bureau of Investigation gave it an added and ironic fillip by carrying the campaign against lawbreakers to Benefit Street, raiding a "vice palace" and bringing to justice its operators, who had been carrying on their bad business elegantly and quietly under the noses of the high percentage of reputable citizens whose minds were on more seemly affairs.

It being obvious that people of many sorts may be found even on rather short streets, it is not the purpose of these pages to discuss the truth or falsity of the characters assembled by Mr. DeJong in Penny McGuire's boarding house on Benefit Street. Rather it is their purpose, with this preamble, to call attention to another Providence writer who made Benefit Street and its immediate neighborhood the setting for a number of short stories, peopling the region with denizens even more surprising than those created by Mr. DeJong or unearthed by the F.B.I.

Howard Phillips Lovecraft, late of Providence, lived most of his not very long life in his native city, and the last few years of it in a house set a little back from College Street, almost under the eaves of the John Hay Library. He was a writer by profession, doing hack work for others and original work—essays, poems and tales. A life rather slowed down and shut in by ill health gave him time to read enormously, and as he seems never to have forgotten anything he read, he amassed a surprising fund of miscellaneous information on which he drew in his literary work. History and antiquarian lore attracted him, particularly the lore of witchcraft. Scientific concepts, evolution, relativity and the fourth dimension, and the long long thoughts of astronomy interested him also and started his mind off on strange journeys of speculation in time and space. All this contributed to the realistically narrated but fantastically weird tales which it was his pleasure to write.

Mr. Lovecraft dearly loved "the ancient hill," as he called the neighborhood of his home, and in his night rambles, like Poe at an earlier day, he

> Prowled such sweet
> Ways as Benevolent
> And Benefit Street,*

alone or with friends, exploring every curve, highway or byway, learning by heart all the nooks and crannies, even to the graveyard

* The quotation is from "Irony," a poem in the volume, **White Christmas**, by Margaret Emerson Bailey.

back of St. John's Church, packing his mind with the details of graceful spires and interesting public buildings, but dwelling with peculiar pleasure on the Georgian architecture of the older homesteads. The eighteenth century was his favorite era, and so great was his love of old times in Rhode Island that he even liked to fancy himself an elderly gentleman of Providence, living back in the less populous, more leisurely days before the colonies had broken with the Mother Country.

Returning from such rambles in space and time to his desk in his sightly study from which he overlooked the treetops of Benefit Street, dark against the sky-glow of downtown Providence, he spent night after night, which was his working time, using the familiar localities, the characteristic family and Christian names of Rhode Island, and factual details of the present and past of the life and business of Providence to furnish a setting for tales of doings that were strange indeed. For the most part his plots deal with the struggles, not always victorious, of individuals and sometimes of whole families against the malign influences and ghoulish visitations of unnamed and horrible creatures from the sea, or monsters from ancient æons, or even inhabitants of other planets, remote and dim, beings visualized by him as entirely different from humankind in anatomy, abilities, and methods of communication, whose disturbing, mysterious, and baffling behaviour puzzled and bedeviled the characters in the stories.

He did not always make Providence his setting, for every excursion elsewhere gave him new landscapes to use as backgrounds, new local superstitions to weave into his plots. Thus a stay in a New England inland valley that was soon to be flooded for the reservoir of a city water supply gave him material both factual and imaginative for a particularly creepy story of the disintegration of a family and its farm ("The Colour Out of Space"). Moreover, he often swung off into other worlds and other ages in his writing, sometimes very successfully. But mostly he wrote about the "Arkham region," an imaginary bit of New England coastline above Boston and near enough to Salem and the scenes of the witchcraft executions to lend support to the weirdness of his plots, or else about places closer at hand in Rhode Island.

In the making of imaginative tales of the sort that Mr. Lovecraft wrote there cannot help being a good deal of claptrap and mumbo-jumbo. His stories suffer, if too many are read in quick succession,

from similarity in the method of producing a weird atmosphere. It is easy to tire of gothic effects in landscape and in weather when one knows that by such artifices one is being "softened up" to be bowled over at the appropriate moment by the horror of the narrative. One longs for a mystery to develop in a neat, ordinary house, or for a homicide committed in brilliant sunlight. Many of the stories are too long. Cutting would have improved them. And Mr. Lovecraft leaned too heavily on a few trick words that had come to have a heightened significance for him—*nameless* and *forbidden*, for example, to mention two. He also relied much too often on references to things distasteful to himself that he assumed would produce similar feelings of aversion or fear or disgust in others—fishy odors, for instance, which he couldn't endure and used again and again as a symbol of the evil and the malevolent; the strangeness of the foreigner; the unpleasantness of things squirmy and slimy; and chief of all, the sensation of cold. Things clammy and frigid are not very enjoyable for anybody, it is true, but few people could experience the gooseflesh and cold shivers that Mr. Lovecraft must have induced in himself from the chilling winds that blow through his stories and the dank caverns and cellars into which he so often conducted his readers, because few are as susceptible in their own persons to changes in heat and cold as he is known to have been. For him, as one of his friends reports, winter began at seventy degrees! He would have agreed with Dante in making hell cold.

Also one misses humor in the stories. There is a sly humor there, to be sure, but it is not of a kind integral to the story, nor is it addressed to the readers, easing them kindly along, making the characters seem like folks and the horrific events all the more effective by contrast. Instead it is a private, tongue-in-the-cheek humor that mentions ancient (and imaginary!) books of magic by title and author in a manner so matter-of-fact that readers have been known to search the libraries in hopes of securing copies; a humor that wove the names of the author's close friends into some of the magic formulas muttered here and there in the tales, and that paid new friends who lived at a distance the odd compliment of adding their hometowns to the list of habitats in which the ghouls and monsters and queer creatures from other planets that swarm the tales are alleged to have appeared.

In spite of such defects, the fact remains that Mr. Lovecraft had an imagination of more than usual power and writing ability far beyond

the ordinary to conceive such weird tales at all and to work them out so well. He was clever in originating his world of queer beings from "Outside"; and in building some of his stories around the camera, the submarine, the telephone, and other products of scientific wizardry, he interestingly links old necromancy and new. Back in the days before Hitler, when horror stories in real life did not appear daily in the headlines, and lovers of shivers had to satisfy their cravings by fiction, these tales of "illegitimate horror" sold readily to magazines devoted to weird narratives and had an eager reception from the readers of mystery stories. After Mr. Lovecraft's death, two of his admirers from the mid-west, August Derleth and Donald Wandrei, brought out a giant volume of his tales, *The Outsider and Others*, 553 large, fine-print pages (ARKHAM HOUSE, 1939), and purposed to publish soon a volume of his letters and at some future time one of his essays and poems. A pleasing and informing book, *In Memoriam Howard Phillips Lovecraft: Recollections, Appreciations, Estimates*, was prepared by W. Paul Cook at the DRIFTWIND PRESS (1941), and one issue of an amateur journal, *The Olympian*, published by Edward H. Cole, was devoted to tributes and recollections by a number of Mr. Lovecraft's friends. The residue of his manuscript material has been deposited in the John Hay Library.

But to get back to Benefit Street. The writer of this comment is not fond of weird tales she does not easily fall under their spell, and when she does, experiences none of the peculiar pleasure that some people seem to derive from being scared out of their wits. But one below-zero night in northern Vermont, in search of a bedtime story, she opened the huge Lovecraft volume that a friend had loaned her. Her eye chanced on a familiar name in a story entitled "The Shunned House," and she read on just where she had opened the book, astonished to find herself in Providence, wandering along Benefit Street. It was pleasant to be transported so unexpectedly to a neighborhood well known since college days, interesting and amusing to find it figuring as a setting for the outrageous events of a weird tale when she had always considered it seemly and sedate. She read on, absorbed in the pleasures of recollection. And before she knew it, she was getting shivers and a crinkly spine out of the hair-raising particulars of an uncanny and not very believable yarn. Well, of course it was late, and a very cold night! But what more could a writer of weird fiction have asked for his efforts!

Benefit Street is a long street. It seems to be demonstrated that anything can happen on it. One can go to church there, for instance, or to art school, to the library or to court; the Historical Society now faces it, "The Players" perform upon it, the Handicrafters look out on it; little choir boys run along it on their way to school at St. Dunstan's; the Mounted Commands exercise upon it; a plaque upon one building announces that here a President of the United States was once entertained; the Brown Commencement procession cuts it and floods it with spectators; and somewhere in its length, so rumor says, old-time residents gather in a basement studio to interpret to their own satisfaction the plays of Shakespeare. One can savor early Providence under its elms, or the Yankee Providence of today, and one can also travel to foreign lands without leaving the street, if one has an open sesame to the pleasant hospitality of the Syrian, Portuguese, and Jewish homes that cluster around its opposite ends.

How comforting to reflect when strolling on Benefit Street that it is human beings who people it, both sides of the street, and not the ghastly monsters of Mr. Lovecraft's bizarre imaginings.

HOWARD PHILLIPS LOVECRAFT

By Mrs. Clifford Eddy

IT WAS in the middle of August, 1923, that the late Howard Phillips Lovecraft, Esquire, first made his personal appearance in our lives. The first thing we noticed about Lovecraft was his eyes, which, behind their spectacles, beamed upon us in friendliness,—they were gentle, benign, smiling, such a deep brown that they seemed almost black. He wore a straw sailor hat, an immaculate light gray Palm Beach suit, a white shirt and a black four-in-hand tie. When he removed his hat we saw that his hair was carefully groomed and a glossy jet black. At that time he was inclined to plumpness, and despite an unmistakable "lantern jaw" his face seemed cherubic in its contour. Extending lean white fingers in what we came to regard as a typical Lovecraftian gesture, we noticed that, although the day was extremely hot and sultry, his hands were cold.

Under his arm he carried a leather brief-case, bursting with "National Amateur" publications and manuscripts from his own pen. At that time he contributed freely to amateur writers' periodicals, not having thought seriously of commercializing his work.

From our first meeting, we knew that here was a man who would be a loyal friend. Over a period of months we had discussed writing and its fine points, and Lovecraft had put us in touch with a few amateur publications in which our poems had subsequently appeared. At that time Lovecraft himself was no mean poet, and we had learned a lot regarding poetic construction by correspondence with him. Our telephone conversations had been few, as Lovecraft had a deep-seated aversion to anything that smacked of present-day mechanical inventions, preferring to imagine himself a gentleman of the past, long before the days of the telephone and similar timesavers.

At that time we lived but three miles, "as the crow flies," from each other—Lovecraft and his two aunts, Mrs. Gamwell and Mrs. Clark, residing on Angell Street, Providence, while we of the Eddy clan lived on Second Street in East Providence.

Much of Lovecraft's work had appeared in a tiny amateur publication to which he had introduced us; it was known as *The Tryout*, and was published by C. W. Smith of Haverhill, Mass. Through Lovecraft, we received a copy as often as it was printed, and the more we read of Lovecraft's work the deeper was our conviction that here was genius, unrecognized by most, perhaps, but real, unbridled genius, nevertheless. It was our intention to try to impress upon Lovecraft the importance of getting his work before the public in a larger way, and we had the new magazine dealing in so-called "horror stories," known as *Weird Tales*, in mind. The editor, Edwin Baird, was known to Mr. Eddy through extensive correspondence; in fact, my husband was even then in the throes of composing a weird story of his own, tentatively titled "The Beloved Dead," and he wanted Lovecraft to read the manuscript before he submitted it.

We settled in the tiny parlor at our Second Street home, and lost no time in steering the conversation around to the subject at hand. Lovecraft beamed as we praised his work, or what little of it we had seen. Then he shrugged deprecatingly, chuckled, and said: "I'm afraid you overestimate the value of my work because you, yourselves, enjoy reading my trash—I assure you there's nothing phenomenal about my stories; most of them are the result of a vivid imagination, that's all. By the way, I walked over here and found it most pleasant. I must try it again sometime."

We gasped when we realized that, with the thermometer soaring above 90°, our guest had *walked* from his upper Angell Street dwelling to our East Providence abode—and the strangest thing about it was that he wasn't even perspiring! When we knew Lovecraft better, we realized that he could stand heat in any proportion, but cold, not at all.

We discussed weird stories for hours in the stifling hot parlor, and he read aloud from several of his manuscripts, including one he'd composed at the tender age of fourteen—his natural propensity for writing weird fiction was apparent even then. He told us that the real key to success in writing a "weird tale" was to keep the reader's imagination

at fever point, and suggesting terrible things instead of "coming right out" with them. As he discussed the writing of the weird and uncanny, he told us of his story, "The Lurking Fear," a horror serial which was appearing at that time in a small monthly magazine published by a good friend of his,—and of his method of injecting the element of terror in this serial by hints and vague references to the "unknown"—the mounds which sometimes seemed to move; the swollen trees in the cemetery, unnaturally-shaped, with limbs distorted; with vague hints that they fed on buried things; queer sounds and cries in the night; the unexplained disappearance of human beings; and houses which screamed of past madnesses. He closed his discussion by averring that in the terrific power of suggestion lay the secret of success in all weird literature.

When we approached the subject of his submitting his work to the editor of *Weird Tales*, he smiled cryptically. True, he'd allowed his good friend Julius to publish "The Lurking Fear,"—he'd sort of "gotten a kick" (the slang is my own) out of the freakish illustrations an artist had given its characters; but as for trying to market his wares with a modern magazine to which so many writers of various types of "weird" fiction contributed, he was disinterested. He told us frankly that he'd never thought seriously of "commercializing" his work—the artistic side of writing had appealed to him all his life, but the idea of selling his writings appalled him—he shrugged non-committally, folded his manuscripts methodically, and returned them to the well-worn leather brief-case.

The rest of the time was spent in Lovecraft's reading over the manuscript of what was then called by Mr. Eddy "The Beloved Dead," later published in *Weird Tales* under the title "The Loved Dead,"—a story which created a furore among certain readers when it appeared, because it dealt with something then new in the field of weird fiction—the thoughts and feelings of a necrologic individual. The manuscript thoroughly delighted Lovecraft, and he insisted on reading it aloud. He insisted that Mr. Eddy lose no time in submitting it to the magazine, predicting an instantaneous acceptance by its editor. I believe it was his enthusiasm for Mr. Eddy's story that finally convinced him he should likewise submit a few of his own manuscripts to Mr. Baird. That they were accepted at once, everybody who ever read that magazine catering to lovers of the uncanny knows, for time and again Lovecraft's stories have been reprinted by that same magazine, years later, by request of its readers.

After that first visit from Howard Phillips Lovecraft, our friendship was firmly established. Still a self-appointed recluse, at first his personal visits were not too often, but our correspondence was voluminous. When we moved from East Providence, Lovecraft was the first visitor in our new home. As usual, he brought along some manuscripts, among which was his now famous "The Rats In the Walls." He started to read this creepy yarn to us at midnight—and continued, placing special emphasis on certain words as he read, his facial expressions changing as he became so absorbed in what he was reading aloud that it seemed he was actually *living* the story, making it come alive. The conclusion of the story left us literally gasping! I think it was then we both realized that this man possessed the greatest gift of writing weird stories since Edgar Allan Poe. Not only did his characters live and breathe—the surroundings, too, came to life! I'll never forget that night! Many houses in Providence were gas-lighted at that time, and Lovecraft's face, as seen by the flickering rays of gaslight, while he read aloud his own ultra-fanciful creation, was truly something "out of this world"—ever to be remembered. I shuddered myself to sleep that night!

Many times, Lovecraft would surprise us with a gift of sweets for the children, who were then small—milk-chocolate bars were his favorite—and it seemed he always kept a supply on hand. Once we had cold chicken in the ice-box, and, offering our guest some, at one of our many midnight get-togethers, he surprised us by exclaiming: "To be sure—and don't bother with the silverware; it's lots more fun eating chicken with one's fingers!" Cups of hot coffee were his delight, very well-sugared and with plenty of cream. Cheese, he adored, and we often had cheese sandwiches for our repasts. Fish of any kind he heartily hated,—in fact, any sort of sea-food was abhorrent in the extreme to this master of the weird. Many of his most-loved horror tales deal with unnamed monsters of the deep. He had a passion for ice-cream, and could easily consume a quart at a time; chocolate seemed to be his favorite flavor, though he liked all kinds. Danish pastry intrigued him, and at one time he haunted bakeries specializing in pastries of this kind.

Referring to Lovecraft's dread of the cold, there is one night I especially remember. It was late in February and bitterly cold, with the

thermometer dropping rapidly. The hour was extremely late; and trolleys had stopped running; we had no 'phone with which to call a cab. Not realizing it was so cold outside, our genial guest declared that the walk home would do him good; perhaps, he added, he might do a little exploring en route—one of his favorite pastimes was discovering quaint little alleys and byways of which he had never before been aware; and usually Mr. Eddy accompanied him on these explorations, long past the midnight hour. Acting on impulse, Mr. Eddy now offered to accompany him part of the way home, and it is fortunate that he did, for a few blocks later Lovecraft, overcome with the biting cold, slumped to the sidewalk, and had it not been for a nearby all-night drugstore, where Lovecraft was taken and revived, the ending might have been different. As it was, he finished the trip home in a cab. That was the last time he ventured out in such extremely cold winter weather.

It was during the hot summer months that Lovecraft expressed the desire to have Mr. Eddy accompany him on a quest to find a so-called "Black Swamp" somewhere, it was said, in the wilds of Chepachet, R. I.—a swamp so overhung by trees that no sunlight ever penetrated it. Always on the lookout for oddities of nature, the idea of seeing such a swamp intrigued Lovecraft to such an extent that he took the whole day off, leaving his writings, as eager as any schoolboy to witness nature's phenomenon. The whereabouts of that swamp—if such a swamp truly exists—is still a mystery—at least, it was never located, and Mr. Eddy almost had to carry Lovecraft back from the rural excursion, at least a mile, to the trolley line, for, unaccustomed to such vigorous jaunts at that time, the writer of tales macabre soon became so exhausted he could hardly move one foot after the other. It was a great disappointment to Lovecraft that the trip was a failure, as far as finding the swamp was concerned; but the rural characteristics of the village delighted him, and found place, I am sure, in many of his later stories.

Lovecraft often told us, though his stories would seem to belie it, that he did not believe in superstitions or superstitious lore. He had a copy of Cotton Mather, and had access to all of the weird literature by past writers. Ambrose Bierce was among his favorites. Lovecraft loved to discuss writings of his contemporaries, and was never loath to sing the praises of a story that he especially liked. Jealousy was an unknown factor, I am sure, in his life. In fact, he enjoyed helping others interested in writing to "make the grade"—many and varied were his revisions, and the world will never know half of what he accomplished in this field. The poems he revised and made salable for others would stretch from coast to coast, and some of them have gained much recognition without any credit going to Lovecraft—he preferred it that way. Lovecraft, in his later years, accepted the job as "ghost-writer" for many prominent people, and they became famous as writers with few even suspecting that behind their fame was the facile pen of H. P. Lovecraft, Esq. He never boasted of this; to him, it was all in the day's work, and many times we helped him type manuscripts that he had "ghost-written"—up to the time of his demise he abhorred typing, because it came under the heading of modernity, I think.

It is common knowledge among his intimates in the writing field that Lovecraft enjoyed being known as "Grandpa Theobald." His letters to us were often thusly signed, and in a church visitor's book he once signed himself "Howard Phillips Lovecraft, Esquire, Gentleman" —this was during a visit to Providence's oldest, quaintest church one week-day, with Mr. Eddy. The steeple especially intrigued Lovecraft and appealed vastly to his imagination, which was always at its best when viewing ancient architecture.

I have never known another human being who shared Lovecraft's affection for cats to so great an extent. I have seen him stoop and pet and console (using a special kind of language cats seemed to understand), a stray, injured feline; and I know that he loved to feed stray cats.

It was a bitter blow to him when his own beloved cat, "Nigger Man," disappeared strangely one night, never to return. After that, his fondness for cats increased—whenever he saw a black cat, he was reminded of lost "Nigger Man," he often told us—he kept his emotions well-hidden from the public eye, but that he possessed the quality of sympathy I have no doubt. I have seen it exhibited in a thousand little ways—although he would have been the last to call himself a sympathetic individual! When he called at our home he loved to sit in a big rocker and let our cats walk all over him. He knew each cat by name, and they knew, and loved, him. He was especially fond of a calico cat we owned, named "Susie," and when Susie became a mother he actually sent her his "heartiest congratulations!"

Of his marriage to Sonia Greene, not too much is known. He visited us the night prior to his departure for New York, to advise us that he was saying goodbye to Providence, and asking us if we would accept some of the personal furniture he would no longer have any use for. He made no mention at all of his forthcoming marriage. One of these pieces of furniture was a marble-topped bureau, which we still have—another was a folding bed, gone with the years. Both were delivered to us by an expressman the next day.

On the night of his visit to us, destined to be the last for many months, he discussed the fact that "Old New York" with its historic background and many traditions had always appealed to him, and he hoped to be happy there, because from then on New York would become his "adopted state." He was perturbed, however, because he had a "dead-line" to meet—he showed us a freshly-typed manuscript which he had "ghost-written" for no less a personality than the late Harry Houdini, a weird experience of the master magician's in far-off Egypt, scheduled to appear in a forthcoming issue of *Weird Tales*. He told us he hoped in the excitement of leaving Providence on an early morning train, he wouldn't forget and leave the manuscript behind! It was imperative that the manuscript reach the editor by a certain time. Alas—for well-laid plans of mice and men! Taking a "cat nap" while waiting for his train in Providence's Union Station in the "wee sma' hours," the worst happened—the manuscript was lost! The first we knew of it was when a small, frantic statement of its loss appeared in the next morning's Providence Journal's Lost and Found column—offering a substantial reward for its return. The manuscript was never found, but fortunately, seeming to have a sixth sense in such matters, Lovecraft had brought the original pen-and-ink copy of the manuscript to New York, and a public stenographer made quick work of it.

The next news we had of Lovecraft was an engraved announcement of his marriage to Sonia Greene. It was a simple announcement, but it took us so completely by surprise that it was several hours before we thoroughly digested the news. The marriage, destined to be short-lived, took place in New York in the spring of 1924. Lovecraft sent us snapshots of himself and Sonia—now dimmed with the passing of the years—and in letters to us he never forgot to include "Sonia sends her love, and hopes some day to meet you." In the snapshots, Sonia

Greene Lovecraft appeared as a tall, handsome woman, dark and stately. Lovecraft himself looked completely happy and at peace with the world.

At least one weird story by Sonia appeared in *Weird Tales*, bearing signs of Lovecraft's unmistakable revision, and published when she was still Sonia Greene. If Sonia, too, was a writer, we anticipated a long and happy marriage, but such was not to be—after an interval of several months, during which letters from Lovecraft became few and far between, we began to receive postcards from Lovecraft bearing various postmarks, and we realized he had left New York and perhaps Sonia.

Before Lovecraft's sudden departure from Providence he had been deeply interested in Mr. Eddy's idea of writing a story centered around a character devoid of hearing, speech and sight who lived alone in a reputedly haunted house. Lovecraft's encouragement, suggestions, and compliments as the story progressed resulted in Mr. Eddy's "Deaf, Dumb and Blind" being accepted by the editor of *Weird Tales*, and we were pleased to receive felicitations from Lovecraft upon its publication. He felt honored, he assured Mr. Eddy, because he had been present at its conception, so naturally he felt a fatherly interest. He always considered that story Mr. Eddy's best.

Then, after an interval of several months, our genial friend again dawned on our horizon. He had the same affable smile, as he came to our home, but he had lost much weight since his sojourn in New York. It was good, he averred, to feel the sidewalks of Providence once more under his feet. That he had not lost his genius for writing weird fiction was proven by a veritable masterpiece he turned out, its locale Old New York, and its title "The Horror At Red Hook,"—as creepy a yarn as ever left Lovecraft's pen. Lovecraft had that rare gift of sensing a story in old architecture, peopling old buildings musty with disuse, and "The Horror At Red Hook" surpasses many of his other stories, I think, with its sheer hints and inferences.

Many times we took upon ourselves the task of typing his manuscripts; we experienced no difficulty in deciphering his small chirography, but instead we rather enjoyed having a "preview," as it were,

of his latest work. He believed in economizing on paper, and his manuscripts would be written on the backs of old letters, advertisements, or any paper that provided ample space for his needs at the moment. He revised his own stories as he went along, and many times we would have to turn the page of a manuscript upside down, sideways, and search the corners for arrows pointing to words he wished to put in. He had a perfect horror of mistakes, and one of the standing conditions when he sold a story was that he had the privilege, always, of proof-reading his work before it finally was placed in the printer's hands. He never spared himself the job of re-writing a story, no matter what its length, if he noted an error in it.

Although we realized that Howard Phillips Lovecraft had never enjoyed robust health, when news of his death reached us that bleak day in March, 1937, we were momentarily stunned—at a loss for words to console his bereaved aunt, Mrs. Annie Gamwell, who broke the news to us via 'phone. He died at Jane Brown Hospital, and for the benefit of doctors who had attended him he left behind him copious notes on his physical feelings as the end drew near, thinking with his last conscious thoughts of others, as had been his wont. This last gesture paints an eloquent picture, to my way of thinking, of the real Lovecraft—indeed, a gentleman of the "old school"—and of the past he loved.

His funeral was held at High Noon at a funeral home, and, though the little gods of fate seemed to will that we should arrive there too late for the services, we did visit Swan Point Cemetery, with its many tombs, winding lanes and exquisite monuments—and did I imagine it. or did the spirit of our late beloved friend and fellow-writer hover over us as we bowed our heads in reverence and respect to the memory of one of the finest men—yes, and greatest geniuses, who ever walked this earth? A man little-known, perhaps, by the majority, but a man who, to those who came in more than casual contact with him, exemplified all that is fine and good in a fellow human being.

Long may the spirit of "Howard Phillips Lovecraft, Esquire, Gentleman" endure!

MISCELLANEOUS IMPRESSIONS OF H.P.L.

By Marian F. Barner

WHEN Mrs. Phillips Gamwell, Howard Phillips Lovecraft's aunt, returned to Providence from Cambridge, Mass., she and H.P.L. took an apartment on College Street near my dwelling. I had heard of Mrs. Gamwell before, so it was not long before I was visiting her, thusly bringing about my acquaintance with her nephew.

What stands out in my acquaintance with H.P.L., was his whimsical humor, his love of the past, and his love of cats, not to speak of the avidity with which he read any scrap of writing on Edgar Allan Poe, his ideal.

It was very fitting that Mr. Lovecraft lived his last years in a house said to be built about 1815. His study, where he worked the entire night, looked out onto the yard of a fraternity which contained a shed, an ideal "club-room" for the neighborhood cats. He soon had a K.A.T. fraternity, and in letters wove whimsical yarns along this vein. Some of his letters to me were decorated in pen and ink, and bore a letter head of cat's faces.

Whenever I told him of any cat in down-town Providence, suggesting election into above fraternity, he almost always knew of it. Possibly these endeavors of mine earned me the election into the "Fraternity" as an honorary member, "with complimentary purrs." At one time he wrote in a brochure on cats, which he presented to me, that the said brochure was "not yet published." The latter is now in the possession of the John Hay Library of Brown University.

His handwriting was not easy to read, as he used, among other things, the old fashioned long "s." Realizing his weakness, he would often compare his manuscripts very carefully with the type.

When I lived on Meeting Street, he once sent me a postal directed to "Gaol Lane," its former name. He was delighted that I received it

promptly without correction. Evidently one Providence Post Office official knew his Rhode Island history!

His aunt once told me of the meals he would pick up at various, unearthly hours, perhaps at a diner. He abused his digestion horribly according to her reports. His use of sugar in his favorite beverage, coffee, was enormous.

At Christmas time, I would get his help to "smuggle in" my present to his aunt. I can clearly remember the three of us sitting around their tiny Christmas Tree.

Mr. Lovecraft could sing, though I heard him sing but once. He possessed a clear, light voice.

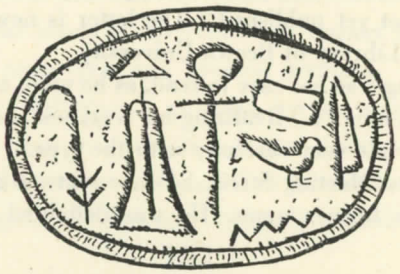
He once told me a walk to Roger Williams Park* was nothing to him, and that there he could sit on a bench, and work at his writings, entirely oblivious to the passing crowd. If you saw him on the street, he never saw you. As he shot by, you realized that his body was there, but his thoughts were elsewhere.

It seems there is a postal law enabling one to write on most of the address side of a picture postcard. Mr. Lovecraft took a fiendish delight in covering every bit of a postal that he could, with the message. He was the despair of the postal authorities. Those postals were crazy-looking things!

He told me that it was his custom to read aloud the plays of Shakespeare with his mother. The more cruel the part, the better he liked it, and would shout it out to be heard by the neighbors. I have had neighbors tell me of his "quarrels," but I know that it was only Shakespeare being read.

I know how much store Mrs. Gamwell set by him, and how much she missed him after his death.

* Editors' Note: Roger Williams Park is about four and one-half miles from H.P.L.'s house.



A GLIMPSE OF H.P.L.

By Mary V. Dana*

So all who hide too well away
Must speak and tell us where they are.
—Robert Frost.

IT IS difficult, even in an old book shop where discussions on any subject take place hourly, to draw out shy people. Even a friendly remark concerning their apparent interest often frightens them away, so we have learned to let these elusive spirits come and go without contact, unless they seek it. Such was our experience with H.P.L. Though the shop was then at the foot of his street and he came in occasionally, we rarely exchanged a word or even knew his identity until the summer of 1936. In fact, the only thing we remembered about him up to that time was the fact that he often had a copy of *Weird Tales* or similar magazine under his arm, and once spoke with distaste of their lurid covers.

We met at that time a young booklover, R. H. Barlow by name, who became badly smitten, bibliomanically speaking, with a little set of books we had. He was visiting an uncle, whom he mentioned with such enthusiastic admiration and affection, describing him as an author and scholar of rare erudition, that he aroused our curiosity. He kept popping in practically every day of his visit to look at this set, trying to calm his conscience or squeeze his pocketbook. Finally he decided to have his uncle lend his approval to fortify his own.

Well, Uncle did come, and we were all eagerness to meet him. My first impression was of surprise at the familiarity of his face, remembering then his former visits. I have since heard him described as tall, but to me he appeared to be about five foot eight, a bit round-shouldered and thin, with a concave sallow face, brilliant lively brown eyes, and

* Mrs. H. Douglass Dana, of Dana's Old Corner Book Shop.

a reserved up-turned mouth. He bowed familiarly to Douglass and turned at Barlow's suggestion to pass judgment on the set. He agreed that it was appealing, but suggested that its purchase might be a strain. Since B's interest still waxed, he suggested with a twinkle that he could always do what he did. I looked at him closely, wondering if he could mean skipping meals, and remember thinking that he did look thin. The way Barlow retorted, "Oh, that!", as though he couldn't ever, confirmed my suspicions. At such times we feel like making gifts to enthusiasts, but remind ourselves that money is a measure of true interest and thus keep solvent. Barlow did buy them, however, and went happily on his way.

We were both disappointed that H.P.L. stayed only a few minutes discussing those particular books.

It was a fleeting glimpse, but he left an impression of a frail, intense person, reserved, but with a gleam of satirical amusement in his eyes, reflected in a tight-lipped mouth.